Brother calls Ruby portrayal 'very real'

By Amy Wilson
Knight-Ridder Tribune News Wire

DETROIT — Earl Ruby has endured a lot in the 30 years he's spent defending the name of his famous brother, Jack.

Tuesday he endured still more.

In a darkened viewing room, the Detroit businessman watched "Ruby," a new movie due out today, starring Danny Aiello in the title role.

It made Earl laugh. It made him cry. It made him mad. And in the end, he called it "disgusting."

The film was made without the family's participation. It may well decide what a new generation of Americans will believe about his brother:

That Jack Ruby, the man who shot the man who shot John F. Kennedy, was a part of an intricate CIA plot to assassinate world leaders.

That he became the CIA's weapon of choice because organized crime leaders wanted it so.

That Jack Ruby knew about this, fancied himself a major player, but instead was a patsy to be pitied; a small-time hood, a one-time hit man, a man seemingly without real friends or real family.

Earl Ruby knows that movies create fiction. But this one puts words in his brother's mouth, motives in his pockets and guns in his hands. It has done something worse to Earl Ruby.

It made him remember.

The 76-year-old financed his brother's ventures. He paid for his unsuccessful defense in the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald. He watched him die of cancer in 1967, insolvent and unredeemed.

And he has spent almost three decades talking and testifying and swearing to a bevy of Congress members, a lot of talk-show hosts and countless journalists that Jack Ruby was just a regular guy who loved his country and did what "every red-blooded American" wanted to do.

At the Detroit media preview of the film, Jack Ruby's baby brother moved uneasily in his seat as he sought to escape the last painful minutes of the film, the minutes that show his brother being given an injection in a veiled hint that he might have been murdered in prison.

"To hear him screaming in the cell, that was too hard," Ruby said. "I pictured that that was Jack."

Earl said that, at times, Aiello sounded like his brother and, except for some extra weight, looked like him, too.